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C H A R G E

DELIVERED TO

T H E C L E R G Y

O F T H E

Diocese of LICHFIELD and COVENTRY,

At the BISHOP'S Primary Visitation
in 1775 and 1776;

And printed at their request,

L O N D O N: MDCCLXXVI.

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C H A R G E

DELIVERED TO

THE CLERGY

OF THE

Diocese of Lincoln and Coventry



At the Bishop's Library

in 1775

And printed at their request

L O N D O N M D C C L X V I

A CHARGE, &c.

REVEREND BRETHREN,

IT having pleased God to call me to the care of this large Diocese, I thought it became me to take the first opportunity, which the established course of Visitation afforded, of meeting my brethren, the Clergy: that so we might be the sooner acquainted with each other; and that, by means of their prudent advice and information, I might be the better enabled to sustain the weighty office imposed upon me.

I may, hereafter, as occasion serves, be more *particular* in my directions to you. At this time, it will be sufficient to lay before you some *general* considerations on

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our common PASTORAL DUTY, and to animate myself and you to a faithful discharge of it.

When our blessed Lord and Master sent forth his favoured servants to labour in that ministry, to which he had called them, he addressed them in these memorable words—*I have chosen and ordained you, THAT YE SHOULD GO AND BRING FORTH FRUIT, AND THAT YOUR FRUIT SHOULD REMAIN*: ‘That ye may go with this commission to plant my doctrine in the world; and that, by your cultivation of it, it may take such root as to bring forth a fruitful harvest of believers, and continue to do so through all ages.’

But what, then, is this *mature and perpetual harvest*, which is here proposed to the Disciples, as the end of their labours? Is it a harvest of such believers, as shall barely give their name to Christ? Certainly, not: but of such as shall be found worthy of him. It is a harvest, then, of

John xv. 16.

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well-informed, pious, and righteous, believers. This is the precious everlasting *fruit*, which it was entrusted to their office to produce : and this fruit, the due discharge of their office, under the blessing of God, makes them *capable* of producing.

In these affecting words, then, of our divine Master (the more affecting, because among the last that were uttered by him) the *Apostles*, first, and, after them, *all* succeeding ministers of the Gospel, are called upon to bring forth,

1. The fruit of a RIGHT FAITH in their hearers ; as resulting from the soundness of their doctrine. 2. The fruit of PIETY in their flocks ; in consequence of a diligent ministration in all the offices of their sacred function. And, 3. The fruit of CHARITY in their Christian brethren ; as springing out of their godly exhortations and blameless examples.

Such, my reverend brethren, is the end, for which we are *chosen and ordained* to

serve in the church of Christ. And though, in setting this end before you, I shall but reflect your own thoughts: yet, in doing this, I may be a no unuseful, certainly, no ungrateful remembrancer; since it is the duty, the desire, and the glory of us all, that we *bring forth fruit*, and that *our fruit remain*.

I. The FIRST object of our ministry is, to instruct our hearers in the RIGHT FAITH: and to this end, we are required to *take heed to our doctrine*^b.

The Religion of Jesus claiming to be from God, the *doctrines*, it delivers, are as well to be believed, as its *precepts*, to be observed. Thus, a *dogmatic theology* becomes essential to Christianity; and its professors are equally bound by a certain rule of *faith*, and of *manners*.

When the Scriptures of the New Testament were made public, these were that Rule of faith to the whole church of Christ. And, if that Church had *agreed* in the in-

^b 1 Tim. iv. 16.

terpretation of them ; or, if peace and charity could have consisted with its *disagreement*, no other provision for the maintenance of the faith had been thought needful. But the Scriptures, like all other writings, being liable to a different construction, according to the different views and capacities of uninspired men ; and it being presently found that such difference of construction produced the most violent animosities among Christians, while each sect pretended a divine authority for its own fancies ; no remedy occurred for these disorders, but that the *catholic* church should be held together by one and the same confession, received and acknowledged by all its ministers : or, when, afterwards, this extensive project was found impracticable, that those, who agreed in the same interpretation of the sacred oracles, should be allowed to separate from all others, and unite themselves into one distinct and *subordinate* church.

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Thus,

Thus, *Schism*, though it be always an evil, and may be a crime, was introduced into the church ; and was even tolerated there, to prevent other and greater evils, as well as crimes, from flowing into it. For, though a diversity of interpretation, in consequence of this liberty, prevailed in *different* Christian communities, which yet acknowledged the same common Rule, *the Scriptures of God* ; still, peace was, by this means, preserved in *each* particular community : and, by virtue of that general principle of mutual toleration, which the expedient itself implied, it was, or might be, in good measure, preserved through *all the quarters* of the Catholic church.

This, in one word, is the ORIGIN, and, at the same time, the JUSTIFICATION, of Creeds and Confessions ; which are only a bond of union between the members of each Christian society. For the purpose of them is not to set up human decisions against the word of God ;
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but, by larger comments and more explicit declarations, in such points of doctrine as have been differently apprehended, and much controverted, to express and ascertain the sense, in which THEY interpret that word, who communicate together in the same Church.

Thus the case stands, before the State, gives a preference to any particular Church. Thenceforth, indeed, the State concurs with the Church to enforce one common Confession, by confining the emoluments, which it provides for the encouragement of Religion, to the peculiar doctrines of the favoured Church. This, the State does, in *equity* towards that religious society, with which it is now so closely connected: it does it, too, in *prudence and good policy*; because it conceives its own true interests to be concerned in maintaining those peculiar doctrines.

Thus, whether we regard the *Church*, before it acquires the countenance of the State, as intent on truth and orthodoxy, and

only meditating how best to preserve that truth in the bosom of *peace*; or, whether we regard the *State*, after it affords that countenance to the Church, as studious to provide for its own great object, *General Utility*, of which the preservation of peace makes so considerable a part; either way we understand why an agreement of opinion is required in the appointed Guides and Teachers of Religion. But, as such agreement cannot be expected, or not maintained, where every Teacher is left to inculcate what doctrines he thinks fit, hence some *common formulary* of faith (not in opposition to that delivered in the Scriptures, but by way of more precise explanation of what is believed to be its true meaning) is reasonably proposed to the assent of those Guides and Teachers, before they exercise their office in any particular Christian society; as a **TEST** of their opinions; and as a **RULE**, by which, in subordination to the general Rule of Christians, they undertake to frame their public instructions.

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This Confession, or formulary of faith, with us, is THE THIRTY-NINE ARTICLES: to which a subscription is required from every candidate of the Ministry. So that THE SCRIPTURE, interpreted by *those articles*, is the proper rule of doctrine, to every Minister of our Church.

It follows from what has been said, that such, as cannot honestly assent to this formulary, *must* (if they aspire to be public Teachers of Religion) unite themselves with some other *consentient* Church. This compulsion may, sometimes, be a *hardship*; but can, in no case, be an injury: or, if some may chuse to consider it in the light of an *injury*, it is such an one as must be suffered by individuals for the general good of that Society, to which they belong.

It is nothing, that some object to these articles, as *improper*, or *ill-drawn*. The Church will judge, for itself, of these points. Societies have surely the same right of private judgement, as Individuals; and, till they revoke a constitution, it should,

should, methinks, be presumed that they see no cause to do it: just as it is very fitly presumed, on the other hand, that such individuals, as will not subscribe to this constitution, cannot. But it is forgotten in this dispute, that, although *truth* can only be on one side, *good faith* may be on either.

Still, it may be said—" *These articles are, themselves, liable to various interpretations.*" Without doubt, they are: and so would any other, which could be contrived. Yet, with all the latitude of interpretation of which they are capable, they still answer, in a good degree, the main end of their appointment; as may be seen from the animosity expressed by some against them, as too strict. And, if we only use *that* latitude, which the expression fairly admits, and which the Church allows, they will continue to answer the *great* end, hitherto effected by them, of preserving, among the members of our Church, *an unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.*

Such

Such then is the fruit of a *right faith*, which the ministers of our Church are required to bring forth, by the *soundness of their doctrine*.

II. They are, in the next place, ordained to produce the fruit of PIETY, in their several congregations, by a faithful discharge of the sacred offices, committed to them.

The LITURGY of the Church of England, in which these offices are contained, is composed with so much wisdom, and is animated, at the same time, with so true a spirit of piety, that impartial men have generally agreed in the commendation of it. That the *forms*, prescribed by it, may be lawfully used, *few*, at this time of day, will dispute. That *other forms*, more complete and perfect, *may* be devised, as it is not denied by *us*, who hold those forms, however excellent, to be of human composition, only; *so*, that any such forms of greater perfection are likely to be devised by those who are the readiest to find fault

fault with our Liturgy, will hardly be expected by reasonable and knowing men. Much indeed, abundantly *too* much, has been said and written on this subject. Most of the defects, which some have pretended to find in our Ritual, are purely imaginary: the rest, are certainly unimportant. So that our concern is plainly to submit all deliberations of this sort to the wisdom of the Church itself; and, in the mean time, to give all the effect, that depends on *us*, to the ministration, which it requires.

And to this end, it must be our duty to perform the sacred offices, with *regularity*, *decency*, and *fervour*.

1. By *regularity*, I mean such an observance of times and seasons, and of all the modes of performance, as the Church hath thought fit to prescribe. To this observance we are, indeed, constrained by ecclesiastical penalties: but I mention it as a fit testimony of respect to public authority; and as the means of promoting the true interests of Religion. For what is
punctually

punctually performed by the Minister, will acquire a due consideration with the people: and the uniformity of *our* service will make the attendance on religious offices more acceptable, more convenient, more edifying to *them*.

2. Nor is it enough that these offices be performed regularly, or according to stated rules: they must also be performed *decently*, or with due grace and propriety in the *manner* of discharging them. For it is not, perhaps, enough considered, how much a becoming celebration of the sacred offices contributes to make men delight in them, and profit by them: or, on the contrary, how much any degree of negligence in the *posture*, or of impropriety in the *accent*, or indifference in the *air*, of the officiating Minister, sinks the credit and authority of his ministration, and deadens the attention and devotion of his flock.

3. Still, this regular and decent discharge of our duty, how useful soever, is
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but an *outward* thing, and may, to a degree at least, be counterfeited by those who are, otherwise, very unfit to be employed in this service. To enliven, to animate, to consecrate our ministry, we must bring to it all the zeal of *internal* devotion; such as is sober indeed, but real, active, and habitual; such as flows from a religious temper, and is wrought into the very frame and constitution of our minds. For to this end, more especially, are we set apart from secular pursuits, to give ourselves up to reading, to meditation, to all spiritual exercises; that so we may be thoroughly penetrated and informed with pure affections and heavenly dispositions. When these prevail in us, they will naturally break forth and express themselves in all our ministrations; they will be seen and felt by all who partake of them; and, by a kind of sympathy, will force the hearts of others to *consent* with our own.

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III. The *last*, and best fruit, we are to produce, is the fruit of CHARITY, or a good life, in those committed to our charge; which is more especially cultivated and matured by our godly exhortations, and blameless examples.

I. As to our public exhortations, and discourses from the Pulpit, such an audience as this cannot want to be instructed in the manner of preparing them. Permit me only to say, "*That your Sermons cannot well be too plain; and that they ought to be wholly Christian.*"

The word of God is designed for the edification of all sorts and degrees among us, and should be so dispensed as to reach the hearts and understandings of all. And I need not say to you, who hear me, that to frame a discourse in this manner, as it is the usefulest way of preaching, so it will afford full scope and exercise for all the talents, which the ablest of us may possess.

But, further, you will allow me to observe, that the topics and principles, on which we form our discourses, must be *wholly Christian*. I do not mean to exclude natural Reason from our public exhortations, but to employ it in giving force to those best and most efficacious arguments for a good life, which the Gospel supplies. I would only say, That we are not to preach morality, in exclusion of Christianity: for that would be to incur the guilt of *preaching ourselves*, and not *Jesus Christ*.

The various motives to virtue and all goodness, which may be drawn from the great doctrines of the Christian Revelation, as they are infinitely more persuasive and affecting, than all others; so they should be constantly and earnestly impressed on our hearers. To live, as becometh the Gospel, is the duty of Christians; and therefore to preach that Gospel, must be the proper duty of Christian Ministers.

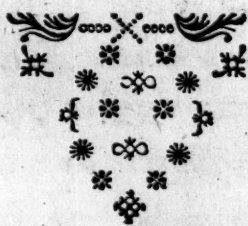
For that *other* requisite of a *good example*, the case is too plain to require more than one word. Our blessed Master has told us, that *we are the salt of the earth*: and *we* remember, what he pronounces of that salt, *when it hath lost its savour*. This warning may suffice to guard the minister of the word from gross vice and immorality. But much more is expected from him. He is to *excell* in all virtue, and in such sort as to make it amiable in the eyes of men. He is to take care, that even *his good be not evil-spoken of*, and that *the ministry be not blamed*. For there are certain decencies, which must be ranked by us in the place of virtues. To be wanting in *these*, is to scandalize the brethren, and dishonour ourselves. Our profession is so sacred, that even our Christian liberty must be abridged, on many occasions; and we must deny ourselves an *innocent* amusement, when we have reason to conclude, that others will take offence at it.

How far, and in what respects, this sacrifice must be made to the decencies of our profession, is a matter of great prudence, and charity; and can only be determined, in particular cases, by an honest exertion of those two principles.

We have now, my reverend Brethren, presented to you a brief sketch of our ministerial duties. And our encouragement, for the performance of them, is, That, hereby, we shall bring forth fruit, and that our fruit will remain: that is, we shall be instrumental in producing a RIGHT FAITH, A PIOUS OBSERVANCE OF RELIGION, and a TRULY CHRISTIAN LIFE, in our several charges and congregations; and we shall, likewise, be the means of transmitting these blessings to Posterity, and of perpetuating these good fruits to the end of the world. Thus, that which is the end of our ministry, is, also, the reward of it. Nor will the recompence of our labours end here. In saving others, by the means, now recommended, we shall

shall assuredly save ourselves. For, by giving this full proof of our ministry, we shall be *sincere, and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ unto the glory and praise of God^c. AMEN.*

^c Phil. i. 10, 11.



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